

National Marine Fisheries Service
Attention: William L. Robinson
Pacific Islands Region
1601 Kapiolani Blvd., Ste. 1101
Honolulu, HI 96814

Dear Mr. Robinson:

In accordance with our responsibilities under Section 309 of the Clean Air Act and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has reviewed the revised Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (DPEIS) "Towards an Ecosystem Approach for the Western Pacific Region: From Species-based Fishery Management Plans to Place-Based Fishery Ecosystem Plans" (CEQ # 20070140).

EPA understands that this Programmatic EIS is the first step towards developing and implementing the appropriate institutional framework and foundation for future fisheries management under an ecosystem approach (i.e., Fishery Ecosystem Plans (FEPs)). The EPA fully supports the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) for taking an ecosystem approach to fisheries management and commends NMFS for preparation of this initial analysis.

As discussed in the revised DPEIS, the preferred FEP Boundary alternative (Issue 1: Fishery Ecosystem Boundaries: Alternative 1D) that encloses each of the region's four archipelagic areas and a single pelagic FEP appears to be an appropriate approach for delineating FEP boundaries. Clearly, such an approach should provide significant positive long term impacts to the fisheries.

EPA's overall rating of the revised DPEIS is LO-Lack of Objection to the proposed action. Although we rated the original DPEIS and this revised DPEIS document as LO, EPA requested that a few issues be clarified and addressed in future documents on this action. We appreciate the responses provided to our previous comments. However, we have noted that a couple of new issues have arisen with the development of this new document that we hope will be clarified in the FPEIS. The general issues are as follows:

Trophic Interactions and FEPs:

- 1.) It would be helpful if the FPEIS discussed in greater detail how fishery interactions (i.e., predator-prey relationships) will be factored into the decision making process to add or remove species to the list of management unit species in FEPs.

Environmental Justice (EJ) and FEP Process

- 2.) The DPEIS mentions that “various fisheries in the Western Pacific Region have participants representing a variety of ethnicities that would fall under the minority provisions of the Executive Order. For example, the Hawaii-based longline fleet includes sizable proportions of Korean-Americans and Vietnamese-Americans, as well as individuals from a variety of other ethnicities.” The DPEIS also states that “previous FMPs and research have identified environmental justice issues among such members of the fleet. Subsequent monitoring of these fishermen and their families was conducted to describe the range of social and cultural effects at the individual, family, community, and industry levels” (Allen and Gough 2006). While EPA appreciates that NMFS highlighted potential EJ issues with EJ fishing communities, we recommend that the FPEIS explain in greater detail what were the specific EJ issues that were identified by the Allen and Gough study. Also, we would recommend that the FPEIS provide a summary of the overall findings of the report by Allen and Gough.

EPA noted that a statement is made in the environmental consequences section of the DPEIS that the proposed actions are inherently designed to “facilitate and strengthen the role of such groups within the fishery management process.” It would be helpful if the FPEIS further supported this statement by evaluating in greater detail whether EJ fishing communities would or would not be adversely impacted by the proposed actions. EPA recommends that the FPEIS provide a more detailed discussion of the structure and numbers of potential EJ fishing communities that may or may not be impacted by the proposed actions. For example, the FPEIS could incorporate and analyze the available data sets from the Allen and Gough study on EJ fishing communities to determine the potential impact.

We appreciate the opportunity to review this revised DPEIS. We also look forward to reviewing future documents related to this project. The staff contact for this review is Matthew Harrington and he can be reached at (202) 564-7148.

Sincerely,

Anne Norton Miller
Director
Office of Federal Activities

cc: Steve Kokkinakis; NOAA Office of Strategic Planning